DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 377 518 CS 214 694

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TITLE Redefining Ourselves and Teacher Education: A Full-Year Job Exchange.
PUB DATE Nov 94
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (84th, Orlando, FL, November 16-21, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; Educational Research; *English Instruction; *English Teacher Education; Faculty Development; Higher Education; High Schools; *Teacher Exchange Programs; Teacher Role; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS *English Teachers

ABSTRACT

Two educators exchanged jobs as high school English teacher and teacher educator for one full year. The goal of their research project was to develop a disseminable, synergistic model for school/university research and teacher education collaboration. The educators functioned fully in one another's jobs. Preliminary results indicated both problems and strengths. Problems included lack of time for sharing each other's work; the tendency for the teacher educator to be applauded for her move to the classroom, while the high school teacher's colleagues believed she was "getting a year off"; and the teacher's perception that her input at the college level was "abrasive" to some university colleagues. Strengths included a real sense of respect and camaraderie between the two educators; extremely supportive educational environments outside funding for transcription of field notes; service of a graduate assistant; and the opportunity for the classroom teacher to take on full research responsibilities. Research insights to date include: (1) specific students in a particular classroom are the core of the curriculum; (2) teachers must strive first to build community, then to facilitate learning of skills, concepts, and content; and (3) students should have time, choice, and response to their reading, writing, language, and speaking experiences. Teacher educators need to help beginning teachers understand discipline with dignity, crises of adolescents, cultural diversity, and overcoming the perception of guilt and failure. (Contains 9 references and a 13-item list of sample reports of job exchanges and relevant school/university relationships.) (RS)

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Redefining Ourselves and Teacher Education: A Full-Year Job Exchange

"The SYNERGY Project"

Synergy: combined action; the working together of two or more; cooperative

Presentation for the National Council of Teachers of English, November 1994

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Objectives of the Study

The goal of this study is to develop a disseminable, synergistic model for school / university research and teacher education collaboration. Specifically, the two primary authors (Hudson-Ross and McWhorter) exchanged jobs as high school teacher and teacher educator for one full school year in 1993-1994. While conducting the normal work of these jobs--including on-going collaborations between the school and teacher education programs--we have acted as active participant observers to collect and analyze data regarding teaching and learning within the context of our "new," alternative settings. We continued to be full participants in school change efforts, college of education curriculum development, and efforts at co-reform jointly explored by school and university; however, for this year, we functioned fully in one another's shoes. Our salaries and benefits were paid by our original employers; we simply showed up and did the work expected of the other partner.

Specifically, McWhorter was vitally involved in Language Education curriculum development and team-taught courses with a new faculty member in the spring. With a graduate assistant, she was completely in charge of 25 hours of curriculum and methods and student teaching for a group of 20 undergraduates and masters students for two quarters. She took over leadership for our research and funding requirements including project reports and writing grant proposals for extended funding. She became the primary investigator in a separate NRRC grant for 1994-1995 with others; this involved invitations and decisions on inviting 25 teachers as participants, human subjects approvals, school system approvals, arranging interviews, etc. Due to the flexible time she had, she expanded her staff development activities, working in a wide range of schools throughout the state.

Meantime, at Cedar Shoals High School, Hudson-Ross taught five full classes a day (3 average sophomore and two senior Advanced Placement); carried out normally assigned hall and cafeteria duties in the morning; worked with administrators, colleagues, counselors, parents, and students on a regular basis; planned and carried out instruction; evaluated student progress and work; and served on a school task force for instruction. Together, we continue to be key players in the school/university "co-reform" project through the Coca-Cola Initiative which has evolved this year into (1) a school-based Teacher Support Group of 15 interdisciplinary teachers involved in peer-coaching and (2) "undergraduate infusion," making high school classes and teachers available to UGA students on a regular basis early in their college careers.

Our overall research questions for the study were as follow:
(1) What is our shared vision of teaching and learning English in today's high school classroom?
(2) How can we help beginning teachers (and teachers going through great changes in philosophy, method, or setting) work toward that vision?

Our interpretive fieldwork will lead to a locally useful model for collaboration between teacher education and a public school and to analytic narratives, data reports, and theoretical descriptions (Erickson, 1986) of teaching in one southern high school and in a respected teacher education program at a

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major research institution. Plans are to complete the model and begin publication in 1994-1995. Our first article, "Going Back / Looking In: A Teacher Educator and High School Teacher Explore Beginning Teaching Together," will appear in the February, 1995 issue of the English Journal

Problems and Strengths of This Synergistic Collaboration

As others who have moved into other roles have acknowledged, job exchanges or alternative teacher / teacher education relationships are fraught with potential pitfalls that no collaborator or outside observer can foresee; however, the growing number of such exchanges provides growing insights for future collaborative work of this nature. (See list of some published accounts in reference list below.) We believe that discussions of both the inherent and context-specific problems that arise are important not only to provide insights for future collaborations, but also to highlight our unique qualities and differences as teachers and teacher educators. As we come closer to understanding and appreciating the realities of our differences, we can redefine our work together, all of which is aimed at improving education for students.

In our exchange, we experienced common problems that other researchers and teachers have mentioned and others that may be unique to our settings. Details of problems will be presented elsewhere. Problems we experienced include:

* Lack of time for sharing, planning together, and evaluation of one another's work;

* Difficulty of taking on responsibilities in two worlds at once;

* Tendency for Hudson-Ross to be recognized and applauded for her movement to the classroom while McWhorter was viewed by colleagues as "getting a year off";

* Great effort required to assure that our roles were indeed equal given unequal reward systems: rewards for this exchange for Hudson-Ross in the university system (publishing, research, professional development) seem to outweigh the perceived value of the rewards for McWhorter within the school system (time for reflection, contributions to the profession in other contexts, continued involvement in teacher education curriculum, teaching and research);

* Discrepancies between Hudson-Ross's vision and the realities of students' engagement and expectations in the classroom, especially early in the exchange;

* Extreme amount of time required for both partners to "learn the ropes," the routines and procedures of the other setting, while engaged in the business of that setting on a hectic, daily basis;

* McWhorter's perception, especially early in the exchange, that her input at the college, especially as it related to the "realities" of teaching, were abrasive to some university colleagues;

* Perception that a few university colleagues, including at other universities, resented McWhorter's movement into inservice, typically university faculty's "territory."

We are also quick to recognize the important strengths--both personal and professional--which have allowed this relationship to flourish.

*We have been long-standing friends and colleagues and feel a real sense of respect and camaraderie; we are both excited and interested in improving education; we are both open-minded as to how improvement might occur.

*We are uniquely well-suited for our job exchange. McWhorter has an equal doctorate to Hudson-Ross; Hudson-Ross is perceived by teaching colleagues as "one of those professors who really could do it if she had to."

*We are working in two extremely supportive environments. Almost all teachers at the school respect Hudson-Ross for her work, have shared ideas and insights happily, and encourage her success. The school is committed to long-term, local school governance and improvement. Most teachers are vitally involved. The Language Education Department is recognized for its sincere caring among faculty and students, a special relationship that carries through much of the

college. The college values work in the schools (as evidenced by a request for extra merit pay for Hudson-Ross due to the exchange; future, planned exchanges by other senior faculty; and the School Research Consortium, a group of teacher-researchers within the NRRC headed by Jo-Beth Allen and Betty Shockley). Co-reform efforts wherein college and local schools collaborate are recognized as a major goal.

*Funding allowed for transcription of daily field notes, the help of a graduate assistant to manage data and work in both settings, and convention travel together.

*An outside grant from NRRC allowed McWhorter to take on the full research responsibilities of the university setting, not just teaching as is common in adjunct situations.

*A new faculty member in Language Education has 17 years of teaching experience and real interest in school/college collaboration. Peg Graham has provided support for McWhorter as both moved into the college arena and for Hudson-Ross as she took on a high school teaching role, serving almost as university supervisor now and then in what she has called a "super-student teaching" relationship.

*Our exchange was planned for and lasted a full year. By semester break, both participants felt they were just beginning to understand their new contexts. The full year allowed for far greater growth and very different findings than a single semester would have provided. High school students remained with Hudson-Ross all year; university students remained with McWhorter for two quarters.

We will be the first to argue that such as job exchange is not for everyone and very difficult to survive and balance within one's life. At the same time, we will argue in this paper and future publications that in few other ways can those of us committed to real change in schools and colleges of education honestly learn what we must learn or see as we must see, if we are to move beyond traditions, roles and relationships, and assumed research "knowledge" that hinder more than help our shared profession to grow.

Brief Summary of Research Insights to Date

Our shared vision remains. We believe basically that:
* Specific students in a particular classroom are the core of the curriculum;
* Their personal, lived experiences cannot be ignored in planning and teaching;
* Teachers must strive first to build community, then to facilitate learning of skills, concepts, and content in settings as realistic as possible given the confines of public school settings;
* Classroom decisions should be negotiated by teacher and students within acceptable parameters so that all can learn;
* In English, students should have time, choice, and response to their reading, writing, language and speaking experiences.

Can beginners implement such a vision? We believe so. If so, how can teacher education help beginners work toward that vision? The following are the major points we make in our English Journal article, "Going Back / Looking In: A Teacher Educator and High School Teacher Explore Beginning Teaching Together," February 1995. As teacher educators, we need to help beginners understand:

Discipline with dignity

Crises of adolescents today

Cultural diversity

Overwork and the need for control

Overcoming the perception of guilt and failure

Theory works

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